

# Chapter 1



## Introduction

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The Redevelopment District includes a large portion of the Town extending from its northern boundary to the heart of Downtown. The district contains the oldest section of the town, and dates back to the early 1840's. On the north the district fronts the Little Calumet River, where the River serves as a boundary between Highland and its northern neighbor, the City of Hammond. The southern boundary is Lincoln Avenue, while eastern and western boundaries of the district vary from north to south. For planning purposes, the current boundaries have been expanded to include other areas with strong links to the District or because of opportunities that exist.

The study area offers a variety of housing and retail opportunities for people who like the proximity and atmosphere of a distinct neighborhood with unique shopping and entertainment events. Immediate access to Interstate 80/94 and thus, to all areas of Northwest Indiana and the Chicago land area also make the district a very desirable location for businesses who need easy access to the expressway.

The Highland Redevelopment District Comprehensive Plan aims to launch a new vision for the District. In this effort, the plan provides, in a comprehensive manner, strategies that will address long-range housing, business, employment and retail needs of the community while promoting services and amenities that would encourage people at all points in their lives: to live work, shop and play in the community.



# Community Profile

The history of the Redevelopment District overlaps the history of Highland, as it contains the oldest section of the Town. The Town of Highland's history dates back to 1847 when it was settled by Michael and Judith Johnston. They settled at a high terrain area where the current Ridge Road and Kennedy Avenue cross. At that time, most of Highland was part of the Little Calumet River watershed. The area was heavily overgrown with a variety of plant communities ranging from upland forest to low land marshlands, some of which were very suitable for farming. English, Dutch, German, Irish and other settlers followed in the ensuing years to build a thriving agricultural community.

By the time of its incorporation in 1910, the Town had a population of 304. At that time, Thomas Johansen operated the blacksmith shop at the corner of Highway Avenue and Kennedy Avenue. Richard Hook farmed 31 acres along Kennedy Avenue between Lincoln Avenue and the Cady Marsh Ditch. The Hook home, which he built, still stands at 9028 Kennedy Avenue.

The growth of the Town followed as the northern communities started seeing major industrialization in the early 1900's. The new residents were Polish, Italian, Slovak, Hungarians, and others. The town's largest

growth occurred during 1950, and in 1960, when the baby boom generation started looking for more open space and newer housing. With the construction of the Borman Expressway and an interchange on Kennedy Avenue, it totally changed the character of the study area. A small farming town shortly became a fast growing suburban community with a multitude of housing subdivisions springing up throughout the area. The growth of residential development also gave rise to the development of Kennedy Avenue where initially it was used as a residential street. Kennedy Avenue became a major arterial with commercial uses and other services serving the growing neighborhoods on the northern part of the Town.

Today, the district is centrally located with ample access to a variety of transportation and other regional facilities. The town is a thriving and well-established community, with a unique downtown, and retail sector. Highlands's population has remained virtually unchanged with 23,696 in 1990 and 23,290 in 2004 indicating the stability of the town. The number of households has increased by about 10% over the past ten years, with the size of families up slightly from 2.44 in 1990 to 2.97 in 2000. The new families have given rise to many

new developments in town where it is now almost without any vacant land to meet the new demand of a growing community.

Recent developments in town, however, have taken a new direction. Growth of retail industry, particularly on the southern part of the town, the Highland Grove area, has made Highland a regional center for shopping. The retail development in town has also given rise to a resurgence of residential development particularly in close proximity of the retail areas and where still some vacant land exists. The depletion of the vacant land has also given rise to the opportunities for redevelopment, particularly in the older section of the town better poised for a variety of developments such as office, retail, and residential development.

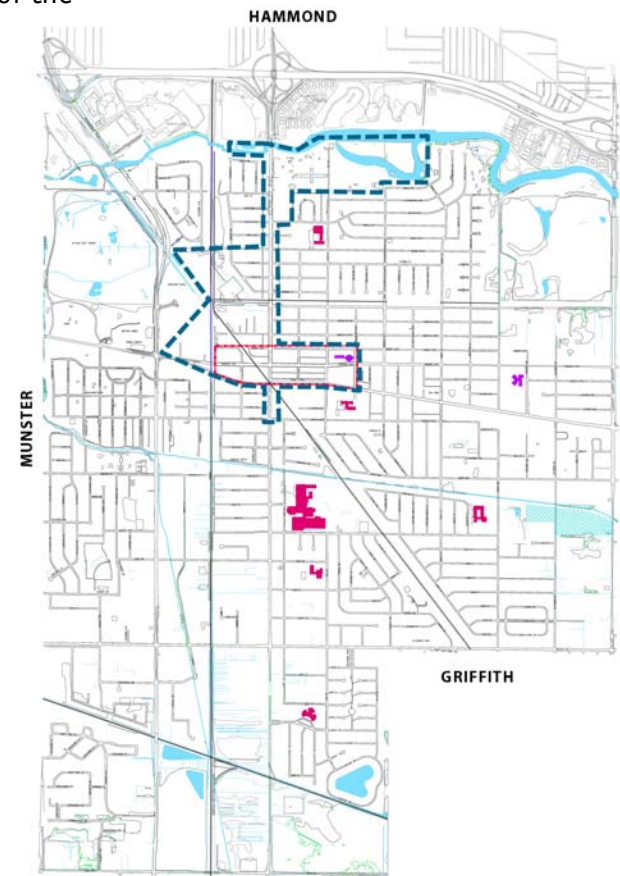
# Purpose of the Plan

Increasingly, suburban communities are calling for a greater sense of community. Fast, unregulated and utilitarian development of the last century has been replaced by a desire for better quality of life and stronger and more permanent design in the built environment. Many older suburban communities are now faced with the task of reinventing themselves to meet the citizen's needs.

As communities have aged and they become more developed and land locked, there is also a shift in focus in many communities from development to redevelopment. There is particularly greater emphasis in reuse and redevelopment of the commercial strips and revitalization of older downtowns.

The shift of focus reflects a new reality as older suburban communities age and mature. These communities are realizing that the past and current patterns of growth and development along commercial strips are unsustainable. As problems increase in older corridors, and as consumer shopping patterns change, the future of strip development is becoming less certain.

The Town of Highland has recognized the shift in development patterns, and is concerned about sustainability of the Kennedy Avenue in the long term. A new vision is needed to take advantage of the opportunities while aiming for sustainable long-term redevelopment of the district. Overall, the Commission has set several goals for the Plan. These goals aim to address these concerns and have been used as a starting point in development of the Plan.



# Redevelopment Plan Goals

The purpose of the Redevelopment District Comprehensive Plan is, therefore, to establish a series of guidelines that manage the future redevelopment and growth of the main gateway to the town and its heart, the Downtown area. The Redevelopment Commission, developers, town staff, the Plan Commission, and Town Council are expected to use the plan as the principal reference document when making decisions concerning the district.

The recommendations outlined in the plan are intended to allow a degree of flexibility. Different redevelopment strategies are tools that can be used to make a better decision and assist in long-term sustainability of the district. Deviations from the plan are expected, but any such deviation should be carefully evaluated. Nonetheless, in all future activities, such deviations should support the overall theme and strategies proposed in the plan.

## ***GUIDELINES***

1. Create a positive city image for the Town through well designed, high quality development.
2. Increase jobs and generate tax revenues through new development.
3. Encourage development of business opportunities for all.
4. Encourage private investment along the corridor.
5. Enhance district neighborhoods through increased well planned economic opportunities.
6. Aid in the elimination of incomplete or inappropriate land use.



# Plan Development Process

The Redevelopment District Plan was developed using a public planning process. Town staff worked closely with the community, seeking input and direction from community leaders, business owners, and representatives of area residents.

The first step in the community participation process was to identify different issues and opportunities by interviewing community and business leaders. In this effort, the Arsh Group Inc., consultant for the plan, conducted one-on-one interviews with more than # individuals representing several and agencies and interest groups.

The second step was to get community input. This phase of the planning process began with the formation of a steering committee designed to reflect the community-at-large. The Committee and citizens participated in the development of the vision for the plan as well as a set of objectives for redevelopment. Facilitated by the consultant team, approximately fifty community members attended the three-hour workshop. Representatives of the town, the Redevelopment Commission and the Council and other public entities also participated. Attendees were divided into three working groups. Each group was

responsible for one the three subareas. Attendees were asked to respond to the following two questions:

- What are the most pressing issues within the District?
- How would you address these issues?

In addition to these statements, the attendees were asked to provide their vision of the District over the next 5, 10, and 20 years.

Each group recorded their responses. They then worked through a series of responses and strategies to the issues they had identified. Detailed responses for each group as well as the results of their visioning are provided in Appendix I to this Plan.

Next, the community at large was offered an opportunity to review alternative redevelopment concepts. These concepts were developed according to the proposals and strategies identified by the citizens and stakeholders. The citizens selected a set of design preferences for redevelopment of the district. The community also completed a visual preference survey and expressed their desires and preferences for redevelopment.



Scenes from the March 29, 2006 public meeting, where citizen input was obtained.

The fourth step was to receive community input about the draft plan. This was done in a public meeting. In this meeting, citizens reviewed the proposed draft plan. Comments received from the residents were then used to refine the plan and prepare the final plan.

Another step in the plan development process was the governmental input process. In this process, the draft plan was presented to the Town Council, the Plan Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, and the Parks Board. Input received from these entities also shaped the development of the final plan.

The sixth and final step of the plan development process focused on plan adoption and implementation strategy. The implementation strategies were presented to the Redevelopment Commission for its review. The implementation strategy was also discussed and reviewed for its financial feasibility with the town staff. The final plan was approved by the Commission and recommended to the Council and other agencies for adoption.

This plan development process allowed the community to establish its own direction for future growth of the district. The results are represented in the vision outlined in the following sections.



*Scenes from the May 31, 2006 public meeting, where the draft plan was critiqued.*

